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Letter dated 9 June 2008 from the Permanent Representative of Djibouti to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

In reference to the letter dated 5 May 2008 from Mahmoud Ali Youssouf, Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (S/2008/294, annex), which was also addressed to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Ban Ki-moon, and further to our meeting on the illegal occupation of a portion of our soil by Eritrean troops, in particular, in Ras Doumeira (Gabla and Doumeira Island), I have the honour to inform you that as of this date, the Security Council has not taken appropriate action on our request.

I believe that you have been led astray by the mediation attempts of regional organizations, in particular, the League of Arab States and the African Union, which have skewed your real perception of the situation.

Although we have explored all the necessary avenues in a bilateral and regional framework, those actions have led us nowhere; all that has happened is that Eritrea has strengthened its troops and made further incursions into our territory in several places.

Unfortunately, all our intense and sustained efforts of the past several weeks in the hope of finding a solution to this crisis have been met with disdain and rejection by the Eritrean authorities.

Similar efforts have been undertaken by friendly countries, and regional organizations such as the African Union, the Arab League and the Organization of the Islamic Conference, have dispatched good offices missions, which have failed because of the systematic opposition of Eritrea, which categorically denies that our countries have even the slightest border issues and continues to insist that:

> "Eritrea is not inclined to get engaged in fabricated problems which are part of external interferences designed to foment crisis in the region. In this event the Government of Eritrea is not prepared to engage in a fruitless public acrimony at this stage".

Fortunately, thanks to the wisdom of our successive leaders, from the time we gained independence to the present day, our regional policy is rooted in neutrality, friendship and respect for good neighbourliness and non-interference in the domestic affairs of other countries of the region, including, of course, Eritrea. We believe in this and we live intrinsically by this policy, which has, among other things, enabled us to live in peace in a region of perpetual crisis. We therefore fail to

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understand remarks like "external interferences" by the Eritrean authorities, which are baseless allegations and run counter to the cardinal vision of our regional policy.

Contrary to what has been reported in various quarters, this is the first time that Eritrean troops are violating our territory and occupying a portion of our soil. In 1996, the Eritrean authorities briefly floated a false map. That, too, was withdrawn in response to our immediate reaction.

When, in 1998, our late President, who was serving on a delegation appointed by the then Organization of African Unity in order to resolve the conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea, was the target of malicious remarks by the President of Eritrea at a meeting in Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso), diplomatic relations between the two countries were suspended for several years.

Situation on the ground, as reported by both our military authorities and third and independent parties

On Friday, 9 May 2008, a delegation from the Peace and Security Council of the Arab League visited our headquarters and reported that the Eritrean Army was present in Djiboutian territory in several places and that intensive work was being carried out non-stop in Ras Doumeira and Doumeira Island (ditches, holes, roads and the like).

Eritrean troops categorically refused to show the work that was being done to members of the delegation, who managed to view only some of it, all the while that weapons were being pointed in their direction.

A second visit took place on Thursday, 15 May 2008, when a high-level Djiboutian military delegation came to Ras Doumeira (top of Doumeira Mountain) and Doumeira Island on board two helicopters.

Our military authorities attempted to climb on foot to the top of Ras Doumeira in order to make observations. Halfway there, they were prevented from continuing to the summit and were arrested by armed Eritrean soldiers. They noted the steady intensification of the work and the risk of a confrontation between the two forces.

Our military authorities also went to Doumeira Island and observed that the tension there was exactly the same as it was at Ras Doumeira.

Further to that observation, our military authorities came to the following conclusion:

> "This situation of extreme tension between our forces stationed so close to each other cannot go on, and we cannot tolerate the threat of foreign troops on our soil indefinitely".

High-level foreign military experts also went to the scene to observe and assess the actual situation on the ground. A delegation from the African Union was there and affirmed that the situation at the border was hardly likely to improve good-neighbourly relations between the two countries.

Lastly, in his article in the *New York Times* of Sunday, 25 May 2008 ("A conflict's buffer zone: rocks, and inches"), Jeffrey Gettleman, after being on the scene, indeed noted the presence of hundreds of Eritrean troops at several places in our territory. He reported the following:

> "The distance between the rival armies is shorter than the barrel of a gun. Hundreds of opposing troops are lined up on the border, staring each other down, from just inches away".

We have therefore come to the conclusion that — although they do not openly admit this — de facto, the Eritrean authorities do not recognize our borders and intend to appropriate a strategic part of our sovereign national territory without justification.

Thus far, our country has shown patience (the crisis began in January 2008), and from the outset, we have favoured and deferred to diplomacy with a view to resolving this crisis peacefully.

All those efforts have been flatly rebuffed by the Eritrean authorities, whose attitude and conduct, moreover, have been disdainful, haughty and irresponsible.

The crisis is growing worse by the day. We believe that the current status quo will continue to be unbearable and cannot go on indefinitely.

We hope that the Security Council will give special consideration to and fully exercise its role in this matter, and that it will assume its responsibilities with regard to this crisis and take swift and appropriate measures, namely, by dispatching a field mission to evaluate the situation and demand that troops immediately pull back to their previous position. We believe that this is the only way to prevent this crisis on time; otherwise, it will have disastrous consequences in an already troubled region that does not need another conflict.

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Roble **Olhaye**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative